

Learning English

American Stories

Pecos Bill

American Folk Tale

Lesson Plan
by Jill Robbins, Ph.D.

Introduction

This lesson plan is to accompany the American Stories series episode, *Pecos Bill, an American Folk Tale*.

A transcript of the story is included at the end of this lesson to print so students can read as they listen. Teachers who cannot play the audio from the website can read the story aloud or have students read it.

This lesson plan is based on the CALLA Approach. See the end of the lesson for more information and resources on teaching with the CALLA approach. The following slide shows the five parts of this lesson plan.

Lesson Elements

Prepare

Present

Practice

Self-Evaluate

Expand

Prepare

Introduce the theme of the story. “Today we will read a traditional American story. It takes place in the Old West, and the main character is a cowboy. What do you know already about cowboys?”

Listen to students’ comments about cowboys.

Summarize what the students said. For example, “Cowboys were free spirits. They lived and worked in the open. They worked with animals and rode horses.” Teach the vocabulary for the story.

Vocabulary

debate - n. a discussion between people in which they express different opinions about something

varmint - n. (chiefly US, old-fashioned + humorous) an animal that is considered a problem

lasso - n. a rope with a loop that is used for catching animals (such as cattle or horses)

tarantula - n. a large, hairy spider that lives in warm regions

scorpion - n. a small animal related to spiders that has two front claws and a curved tail with a poisonous stinger at the end

make up one's mind - idiom. to decide on something

Present

Introduce the story: “Today’s story is what we call a ‘tall tale.’ That means it’s not really true. As we read the story of Pecos Bill, we can use the strategy *classify* to sort out what is true and what is probably NOT true. Let’s try it.”

Play to ‘Mother set off with some of the children to look for Bill, but they could find no sign of him.’

Ask students “What do you think of the story so far? Can it be true?”

Guide a discussion of the events: the family moves, Bill falls out of the wagon and is lost.

Model the strategy: “As I read this part, I am thinking, ‘That sounds like it could be true. I know that the people in the Old West did not like to live in big groups. Also, I know they traveled by covered wagons. It’s possible a baby could fall out of the wagon and be lost. So I’m going to **classify** the information I got in the chart. Make a chart like this on your paper or notebook.” Show the chart on a screen or a board as shown in the next slide. Continue, “Let’s listen to some more of the story. See if you can **classify** what you learn as we read.”

Play or read aloud to ‘He said goodbye to his coyote friends and left to join the world of humans.’

Classify – Truth vs. Fiction

Ask students to form pairs or small groups to discuss Bill's time with the coyotes. Ask for their ideas and write them on the shared chart.

Things that could be true	Things that can't be true
A family moved away from new neighbors The family rode in wagons A baby fell out of a wagon	Coyotes raised Bill Bill understood the cowboy's question (after growing up with coyotes)

Practice

“Now it’s your turn. Let’s read some more. Remember, look for events that you can **classify**. Is it true (it could happen) or it is fiction (it probably didn’t happen)?”

Play or read aloud to ‘Now, when Bill saw the gang he shouted out, "Who's the boss around here?"”

Guide students to continue their group discussion about the events in the story. Continue to write the events they classify on the chart.

Encourage students to continue classifying, “Let’s read to the end of the story now. Keep looking for things you can classify.”

Play to the end of the story.

Ask students to decide what may or may not be true and write it on their charts. If they say something is not true, ask them to explain why. For example, “Bill couldn’t throw a rope as far as the moon because his arm would not be strong enough.”

Classify – Truth vs. Fiction

Things that could be true	Things that can't be true
<p>A family moved away from new neighbors The family rode in wagons A baby fell out of a wagon A cowboy told Bill to become a cowboy Bill joined a rough group of cowboys</p>	<p>Coyotes raised Bill Bill understood the cowboy's question Bill carried his horse Bill fought with a rattlesnake Bill invented tarantulas and scorpions Bill rode a tornado Bill met a woman riding a catfish Bill and Sue lived on the moon</p>

Allow students to practice the strategy with the story

Self-Evaluate

Ask students to stay with their neighbor and talk about the end of the story. “What do you think of this story? Does it remind you of any other ‘tall tales?’”

Give students time to talk about the story.

Ask, “Now I’d like to ask – what do you think about using this strategy, *classify*, when you read? Did it help you pay attention to the story? How about understanding the story? Write a sentence or two on your paper to turn in about how **classifying** helped you today.”

Expand

Ask students, “Are there other times when you can *classify*?”

Listen to students’ responses.

Continue, “This strategy is helpful if you need to decide what to do with information you learn. It gives you a way to focus on new information and helps you pay attention when you read or listen.”

Try using this strategy tonight when you do your homework, or in your next class. Let me know how it goes!”

Today we tell a traditional American story called a "tall tale." A tall tale is a story about a person who is larger than life. The descriptions in the story are exaggerated – much greater than in real life. Long ago, the people who settled in undeveloped areas in America first told tall tales. After a hard day's work, people gathered to tell each other funny stories. Pecos Bill was a larger than life hero of the American West. No one knows who first told stories about Pecos Bill. Cowboys may have invented the stories. Others say Edward O'Reilly invented the character in stories he wrote for The Century Magazine in the early nineteen hundreds. The stories were collected in a book called "The Saga of Pecos Bill" published in nineteen twenty-three. Another writer, James Cloyd Bowman, wrote an award-winning children's book called "Pecos Bill: The Greatest Cowboy of All Time." The book won the Newbery Honor in nineteen thirty-eight. Pecos Bill was not a historical person. But he does represent the spirit of early settlers in the American West. His unusual childhood and extraordinary actions tell about people who believed there were no limits to what they could do. Now, here is Barbara Klein with our story.

Pecos Bill had one of the strangest childhoods a boy ever had. It all started after his father decided that there was no longer enough room in east Texas for his family.

"Pack up, Ma!" he cried. "Neighbors movin' in fifty miles away! It's getting' too crowded!"

So they loaded up a wagon with all their things. Now some say they had fifteen children while others say eighteen. However many there were, the children were louder than thunder. And as they set off across the wild country of west Texas, their mother and father could hardly hear a thing.



Covered Wagon of the Old West

Now, as they came to the Pecos River, the wagon hit a big rock. The force threw little Bill out of the wagon and he landed on the sandy ground. Mother did not know Bill was gone until she gathered the children for the midday meal. Mother set off with some of the children to look for Bill, but they could find no sign of him.

Well, some people say Bill was just a baby when his family lost him. Others say he was four years old. But all agree that a group of animals called coyotes found Bill and raised him. Bill did all the things those animals did, like chase lizards and howl at the moon. He became as good a coyote as any.



Coyote

Now, Bill spent seventeen years living like a coyote until one day a cowboy rode by on his horse. Some say the cowboy was one of Bill's brothers. Whoever

he was, he took one look at Bill and asked, "What are you?"

Bill was not used to human language. At first, he could not say anything. The cowboy repeated his question. This time, Bill said, "**varmint.**"

That is a word used for any kind of wild animal.

"No you aren't," said the cowboy.

"Yes, I am," said Bill. "I have fleas."

"Lots of people have fleas," said the cowboy. "You don't have a tail."

"Yes, I do," said Bill.

"Show it to me then," the cowboy said.

Bill looked at his backside and realized that he did not have a tail like the other coyotes. "Well, what am I then?" asked Bill.

"You're a cowboy! So start acting like one!" the cowboy cried out. Well that was all Bill needed to hear. He said goodbye to his coyote friends and left to join the world of humans.

Now, Pecos Bill was a good cowboy. Still, he hungered for adventure. One day he heard about a rough group of men. There is some **debate** over what the group was called. But one storyteller calls it the "Hell's Gate Gang."

So Bill set out across the rough country to find this gang of men. Well, Bill's horse soon was injured so Bill had to carry it for a hundred miles. Then Bill met a rattlesnake fifty feet long. The snake made a hissing noise and was not about to let Bill pass. But after a tense minute, Bill beat the snake until it surrendered. He felt sorry for the varmint, though, and wrapped it around his arm.

After Bill walked another hundred miles, he came across an angry mountain lion. There was a huge battle, but Bill took control of the big cat and put his saddle on it. He rode that mountain lion all the way to the camp of the Hell's Gate Gang.

Now, when Bill saw the gang he shouted out, "Who's the boss around here?"

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A huge cowboy, nine feet tall, took one look at Bill and said in a shaky voice, "I was the boss. But you are the boss from here on in."

With his gang, Pecos Bill was able to create the biggest ranch in the Southwest. Bill and his men had so many cattle that they needed all of New Mexico to hold them. Arizona was the pasture where the cattle ate grass.

Pecos Bill invented the art of being a cowboy. He invented the skill of throwing a special rope called a **lasso** over a cow's head to catch wandering cattle.



Cowboy throwing lasso

Some say he used a rattlesnake for a lasso. Others say he made a lasso so big that it circled the whole Earth.

Bill invented the method of using a hot branding iron to permanently put the mark of a ranch on a cow's skin. That helped stop people from stealing cattle. Some say he invented cowboy songs to help calm the cattle and make the cowboy's life easier. But he is also said to have invented **tarantulas** and **scorpions** as jokes. Cowboys have had trouble with those poisonous creatures ever since.

Now, Pecos Bill could ride anything that ever was. So, as some tell the story, there came a storm bigger than any other. It all happened during the worst drought the West had ever seen. It was so dry that horses and cows started to dry up and blow away in the wind. So when Bill saw the windstorm, he got an idea. The huge tornado kicked across the land like a wild bronco. But Bill jumped on it without a thought.

He rode that tornado across Texas, New Mexico and Arizona, all the time squeezing the rain out of it to save the land from drought. When the storm was over, Bill fell off the tornado. He landed in California. He left a hole so deep that to this day it is known as Death Valley.

Now, Bill had a horse named Widow Maker. He got that name because any man who rode that horse would be thrown off and killed and his wife would become a widow. No one could ride that horse but Bill.

And Widow Maker, in the end, caused the biggest problem for Pecos Bill. You see, one day Bill saw a woman. Not just any woman, but a wild, red-haired woman, riding a giant catfish down the Rio Grande River.

Her name was Slue-foot Sue. And Bill fell in love with her at first sight. Well, Bill would not

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rest until he had asked for her hand in marriage. And Slue-foot Sue accepted.

On their wedding day, Pecos Bill dressed in his best buckskin suit. And Sue wore a beautiful white dress with a huge steel-spring bustle in the back. It was the kind of big dress that many women wore in those days — the bigger the better.

Now, after the marriage ceremony Slue-foot Sue got a really bad idea. She decided that she wanted to ride Widow Maker. Bill begged her not to try. But she had her **mind made up**.

Well, the second she jumped on the horse's back he began to kick and buck like nothing anyone had ever seen. He sent Sue flying so high that she sailed clear over the new moon.

She fell back to Earth, but the steel-spring bustle just bounced her back up as high as before.

Now, there are many different stories about what happened next. One story says Bill saw that Sue was in trouble. She would keep bouncing forever if nothing was done. So he took his rope out -- though some say it was a huge rattlesnake -- and lassoed Sue to catch her and bring her down to Earth. Only, she just bounced him back up with her.



Earth's Moon 1

Somehow the two came to rest on the moon. And that's where they stayed. Some people say they raised a family up there. Their children were as loud and wild as Bill and Sue were in their younger days. People say the sound of thunder that sometimes carries over the dry land around the Pecos River is nothing more than Pecos River is nothing more than Pecos Bill's family laughing up a storm.

This tall tale of Pecos Bill was adapted for Special English and produced by Mario Ritter. Your storyteller was Barbara Klein. I'm Steve Ember.

Words in This Story

debate - *n.* a discussion between people in which they express different opinions about something

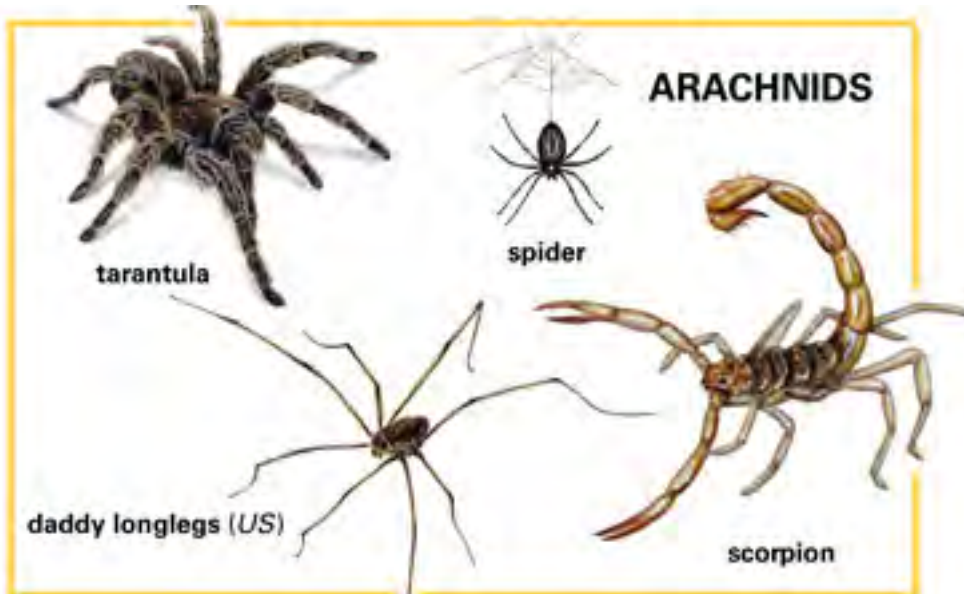
varmint - *n.* (chiefly US, old-fashioned + humorous) an animal that is considered a problem

lasso - *n.* a rope with a loop that is used for catching animals (such as cattle or horses)

tarantula - *n.* a large, hairy spider that lives in warm regions

scorpion - *n.* a small animal related to spiders that has two front claws and a curved tail with a poisonous stinger at the end

make up one's mind - *idiom.* to decide on something



About the CALLA Approach

The Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach (CALLA) is an instructional model for second and foreign language learners based on cognitive theory and research.





CALLA integrates instruction in priority topics from the content curriculum, development of the language skills needed for learning in school, and explicit instruction in using learning strategies for academic tasks.

The goals of CALLA are for students to learn essential academic content and language and to become independent and self-regulated learners through their increasing command over a variety of strategies for learning in school. CALLA can be used in ESL, EFL, bilingual, foreign language, and general education classrooms.

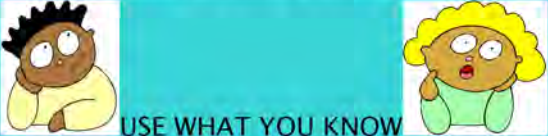




CALLA was developed by Anna Uhl Chamot and J. Michael O'Malley, and is being implemented in approximately 30 school districts in the United States as well as in several other countries.

See a list of language learning strategies below.



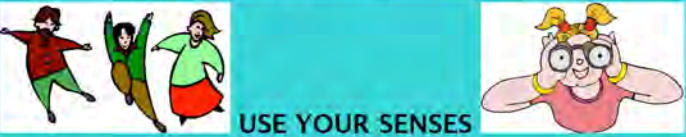


Metacognitive Strategies

CALLA CONTENT AND LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES		
STRATEGY	DESCRIPTION	
METACOGNITIVE STRATEGIES		
Plan / Organize	 <p>Planner</p>	<p>Before beginning a task:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Set goals. -Plan the task or content sequence. -Plan how to accomplish the task (choose strategies). -Preview a text.
Monitor / Identify Problems	 <p>Check</p>	<p>While working on a task:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Check your progress on the task. -Check your comprehension as you use the language. Do you understand? If not, what is the problem? -Check your production as you use the language. Are you making sense? If not, what is the problem?
Evaluate	 <p>I did it!</p>	<p>After completing a task:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Assess how well you have accomplished the learning task. -Assess how well you have used learning strategies. -Decide how effective the strategies were. -Identify changes you will make the next time you have a similar task to do.
Manage Your Own Learning	 <p>Pace Yourself</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Determine how you learn best. -Arrange conditions that help you learn. -Seek opportunities for practice. -Focus your attention on the task.

Task-Based Strategies

CALLA CONTENT AND LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES		
STRATEGY	DESCRIPTION	
TASK-BASED STRATEGIES		
 <p style="text-align: center;">USE WHAT YOU KNOW</p>		
Use Background Knowledge	 <p style="text-align: center;">I know.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Think about and use what you already know to help you do the task. - Make associations between new information and your prior knowledge. -Use new information to clarify or modify your prior knowledge.
Make Inferences	 <p style="text-align: center;">Use Clues</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Use context and what you know to figure out meaning. -Read and listen between the lines. -Go beyond the text to understand its meaning.
Make Predictions	 <p style="text-align: center;">Crystal Ball</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Anticipate information to come. -Make logical guesses about what will happen in a written or oral text. -Make an estimate (math). -Make a hypothesis (science).
Personalize	 <p style="text-align: center;">Me</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Relate new concepts to your own life, to your experiences, knowledge, beliefs and feelings.


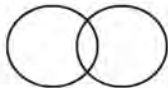


Task-Based Strategies

CALLA CONTENT AND LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES		
STRATEGY	DESCRIPTION	
TASK-BASED STRATEGIES		
Transfer / Use Cognates	 Coffee/Café	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Apply your linguistic knowledge of other languages (including your native language) to the target language. -Recognize cognates.
Substitute / Paraphrase	 Make it work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Use a synonym or descriptive phrase for unknown words or expressions.
 USE YOUR SENSES		
Use Images	 See it in your mind	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Use or create an actual or mental image to understand and/or represent information. -Use or draw a picture or diagram.
Use Sounds	 Sound Out	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Say or read aloud a word, sentence, or paragraph to help your understanding. -Sound out/vocalize. - Use your "mental tape recorder" to remember sounds, words, phrases, and/or conversations.



Task-Based Strategies

CALLA CONTENT AND LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES		
STRATEGY	DESCRIPTION	
TASK-BASED STRATEGIES		
Use Your Kinesthetic Sense		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> --Act out a role, for example, in Readers' Theater, or imagine yourself in different roles in the target language. -Use real objects to help you remember words, sentences, or content information.
  USE YOUR ORGANIZATIONAL SKILLS		
Find/Apply Patterns	 abacus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Apply a rule. -Make a rule. -Recognize and apply letter/sound, grammar, discourse, or register rules. -Identify patterns in literature (genre). -Identify patterns in math, science, and social studies.
Classify/Sequence	 Life cycle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Categorize words or ideas according to attributes. -Classify living things; identify natural cycles. -Identify order and sequences in math, science, and social studies. -Sequence events in history.

Task-Based Strategies

CALLA CONTENT AND LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES		
STRATEGY	DESCRIPTION	
TASK-BASED STRATEGIES		
Take Notes	 <p>PDA</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Write down important words and ideas while listening or reading. -List ideas or words to include in speaking or writing..
Use Graphic Organizers	 <p>A Venn diagram</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Use or create visual representations (such as Venn diagrams, time lines, webs, and charts) of important relationships between concepts.
Summarize	 <p>Main Idea</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Create a mental, oral, or written summary of information.
Use Selective Attention	 <p>Focus</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Focus on specific information, structures, key words, phrases, or ideas.

Task-Based Strategies

CALLA CONTENT AND LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES		
STRATEGY	DESCRIPTION	
TASK-BASED STRATEGIES		
 		
USE A VARIETY OF RESOURCES		
Access Information Sources	 <p>Look it up!</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Use the dictionary, the internet, and other reference materials. -Seek out and use sources of information. -Follow a model -Ask questions
Cooperate	 <p>Together</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Work with others to complete tasks, build confidence, and give and receive feedback.
Talk Yourself Through It (Self-Talk)	 <p>I can do it!</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use your inner resources. Reduce your anxiety by reminding yourself of your progress, the resources you have available, and your goals.